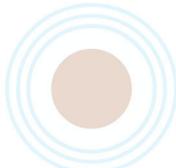




workforce unit

voluntary sector social services workforce unit



Choosing an SVQ Provider

**Guidance from the
Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit**

March 2009



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Purpose of the guide

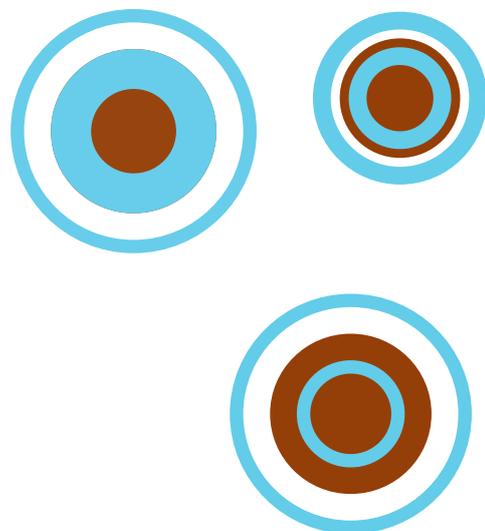
This document explains the meaning of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and who can provide SVQs. It goes on to provide guidance to voluntary sector organisations to assist with choosing an SVQ provider, including a qualitative checklist.

Introduction

As part of its role in supporting learning and development to voluntary sector organisations in Scotland, the Workforce Unit has undertaken the production of this guidance with the collaboration of stakeholders.

Many organisations use SVQs as a way of qualifying their workforce to meet the needs of service users and to meet the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registration standards. Choosing an SVQ provider can be a minefield for organisations that need to find a competent provider for SVQ awards.

We hope this document will go some way towards making the search for a high quality provider of SVQs an easier and more satisfactory process. The guidance begins by explaining some of the often confusing terminology that surrounds SVQs, goes on to look at factors you may wish to consider before engaging a provider and finally presents a checklist for deciding whether a provider is likely to give a quality service. These factors do not guarantee that you will have wonderful provision, but should assist in the decision-making process.



Scottish Vocational Qualifications - SVQs

SVQs are qualifications gained through the assessment of work-based practice, knowledge, and understanding. They are not academic courses, though some of the knowledge required for them may be gained through academic study, but rather an assessment of candidates' ability to do their job well and confidently. SVQs are based upon National Occupational Standards. These are national, UK standards of competence, developed by Sector Skills Councils in collaboration with their stakeholders. The relevant Sector Skills Council also produces an assessment strategy which outlines the conditions of assessment. The SSSC is the Sector Skills Council for social services in Scotland.

SVQs are awarded by an awarding body approved by an accreditation body. For Health and Social Care SVQs delivered in Scotland, for example, the main awarding body is the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), though other awarding bodies such as City and Guilds also operate in Scotland. The awarding body provides approval and external verification of the work of Learning / Assessment Centres. The accreditation body for Scotland is also the SQA.

The main SVQ awards and levels that apply to the social services sector are as follows:

Award	SVQ level
Health and Social Care	2, 3 and 4
Children's Care, Learning and Development	2, 3, and 4
Support Services in Health Care	2
Health (Allied Health Professions Support)	3
Community Justice (Offending Behaviour)	3 and 4
Community Justice (Victims, Survivors and Witnesses)	3 and 4
Leadership and Management of Care Services	4

Who can be an SVQ provider?

SVQs can only be provided by assessment centres approved by an awarding body such as SQA. Assessment centres may be part of service provider organisations or independent of them. They may be part of the statutory, voluntary or private sectors and range from employers having their own learning and development centre to colleges and independent providers. SVQ providers must meet awarding body criteria in relation to structure and quality, and must also meet the requirements of the assessment strategy.

Criteria include:

- Providing qualified assessors and internal verifiers. Assessors assess the work of SVQ candidates to ensure that it meets the standards required by the awarding body. Internal verifiers ensure that the overall quality of assessment meets the requirements of the awarding body and that assessors are all assessing to the same standard. Both assessors and verifiers must demonstrate that they have both the ability to do their jobs competently and that they possess Assessor and/ or Internal Verifier qualifications.
- A centre co-ordinator and/or centre contact to liaise with the awarding body and to be available for external verification visits.
- Organisational policies and procedures in place that promote a quality service, including Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities.
- Completion of awarding body application requirements including having in place processes for candidate registration and for gaining evidence, verification systems and an appeals procedure.
- A letter of approval from the awarding body after completion of all application procedures.

Checking the quality of an SVQ provider

The following information and checklist should enable you to come to a decision about the quality of a learning provider who is offering SVQ support, assessment and/or internal verification.

Where feedback is positive on the majority of items on the checklist, then it is likely that you will receive a good quality service. Beware of providers who offer short completion times and very low charges for candidates; they may look as if they are a bargain but may not give the quality that service users have a right to expect from the workers who help them to meet their needs.

What are realistic timescales?

There are no set timescales for the completion of an SVQ since a very experienced and knowledgeable worker is likely to complete in a much shorter time than a less experienced worker.

There are also different timescales for different levels of SVQ. SVQ 2 for example is sometimes offered in a 3 – 12 month timeframe (three months seems an extremely short time to complete an SVQ 2, even for the most competent of workers), whilst SVQ 4 generally takes 12 - 18 months. A purchaser will be looking for both a realistic average timescale in combination with other quality features such as good induction and support.

It is worth mentioning at this point that it is very important that workers are put forward for SVQs that are appropriate to the role in which they are working, and that they are ready to begin to undertake the SVQ. An initial induction process will usually enable both employers and assessment centres to identify any potential difficulties for the SVQ candidate.

What is a realistic price?

Again, there are no set charges for an SVQ. To give you some idea of what to expect, these are a range of prices from training organisations (the first figure represents one of the cheapest reliable providers), and the 2008 figures that the Voluntary Sector Development Fund (second figure) used in giving grants to agencies for SVQs in Health and Social Care. The huge variation is not just about quality but can also be attributed to factors such as sector, economies of scale for large providers of SVQs, and the geographical location of candidates and SVQ providers :

Award	Cost
SVQ 2	£700 - £2500
SVQ 3	£1200 - £3000
SVQ 4	£1800 - £4000
Leadership and Management of Care Services	£2000 - £3000

Added value

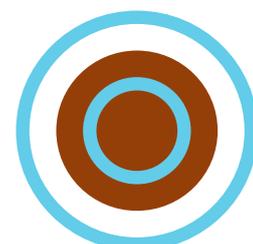
A 'good' SVQ provider will go beyond providing basic assessment and verification of awards in the shortest possible time at the cheapest price. If you are seeking a provider who gives added value, some of the things you may look for are:

- A provider who focuses on the learning and development needs of the employing organisation rather than having inflexible provision. This includes taking into account the learning and development that employees routinely receive from their employer and matching this to the knowledge and skills required for the SVQ.
- A process of induction for those undertaking an SVQ, explaining what is expected of the candidate and what the candidate can expect from the assessor. Induction may ascertain readiness to undertake the SVQ and will include explanation of the SVQ units, assistance to choose optional SVQ units, explanation of the assessment process, explanation of how to record evidence of good practice and knowledge for the log, and how to cross-reference so that one

piece of work can achieve several performance criteria. A provider's SVQ Handbook and /or accompanying workbooks may supplement induction and learning. You would also expect an emphasis on promoting the worth and dignity of service users and, where possible, including them in the learning process.

- A sufficient range of optional units to meet the needs of your organisation. The SSSC has developed guidance on the choice of optional units by grouping some of these into skills sets. Skills sets relate to staff in particular roles and are made up of a number of SVQ optional units from which a choice can be made. For a list of skills sets see Appendix 3.
- The use of individual learning plans for candidates that personalise the learning process, assess where a candidate is starting from, take into account particular learning needs and give credit for experience and knowledge.
- The level of on-going support to candidates through regular meetings with the assessor, direct observation of practice by the assessor, constructive feedback to the candidate about progress and areas that need further development, and encouragement to reflect upon areas of work as a process in moving towards becoming a reflective practitioner.
- Suggestions for, and/or the provision of, learning materials, reading and workbooks to facilitate and enhance candidate learning. (This is not necessarily the responsibility of the SVQ provider and depends upon what the purchaser is agreeing to buy).
- Support to candidates who, for whatever reason, are unable to complete their SVQ.
- Regular and on-going support to assessors and verifiers, providing them with the opportunity to discuss their work and any issues that arise, and to ensure standardisation of assessment / verification processes.
- The involvement of all relevant parties in the assessment process, including managers and service users.
- An evaluation process by the SVQ provider of the quality of SVQ provision, using for example a questionnaire to candidates and managers, evaluation of results, end of award meetings and annual evaluation against a quality framework.
- A willingness to work in collaboration with the employer. It should not be forgotten that employers also have a responsibility in relation to their staff who undertake SVQs, even though another agency is providing the SVQ. Staff need the support and encouragement of their managers and colleagues in order to maintain their motivation throughout the SVQ. An SVQ provider that works closely with the employer/purchaser can enhance the ability of the organisation to support its candidates.
- Positive feedback from people who have already received a service from a provider, together with favourable external verifier reports. Former external verifier reports can be requested from the SVQ provider.

The above factors, together with some additional considerations, are included in the checklist that follows, to provide you with an initial and quick analysis of provider quality.



Checklist: Choosing an SVQ provider

Quality issue	In place and positive impression/ feedback	In place and satisfactory impression/ feedback	In place but negative impression/ feedback	Not in place
The learning provider:				
Is registered with awarding body e.g. SQA				
Has realistic timescales for completion				
Has a realistic pricing policy				
Focuses on learning and development needs of employing organisation and individual candidates				
Takes into account the learning and development that employees receive from employer and matches this to SVQ requirements				
Has a thorough SVQ induction process in place				
Provides support in choosing optional units				
Provides a sufficient range of optional units				
Uses SSSC Skills Sets in developing option choices				
Has developed its own SVQ Handbook and/or detailed printed or on-line guidance				
Demonstrates respect for the worth and dignity of candidates, service users and carers				
Involves, where possible and appropriate, service users, carers and managers in the assessment / learning process				
Has procedures in place to assess learning needs of candidates				
Develops Individual Learning Plans with candidates, which should be reviewed throughout the assessment process				
Has qualified and experienced assessors				
Has thorough processes in place for on-going support and assessment of candidates				
Has qualified and experienced internal verifiers				

continued overleaf.....

Quality issue	In place and positive impression/ feedback	In place and satisfactory impression/ feedback	In place but negative impression/ feedback	Not in place
The learning provider:				
Has thorough processes in place for internal verification				
Has meetings between assessor(s) and candidate(s) on a regular basis to discuss and assess progress				
Has meetings between assessor(s) and internal verifier(s) to discuss candidates' progress and issues				
Has sufficient direct observation of work of candidate				
Has developed holistic assessment of the work of candidates, so that work or assessments are not repeated				
Provides additional learning resources e.g. workbooks, reading lists, learning materials, as appropriate to their contract				
Encourages candidates to become reflective practitioners				
Supports candidates who are experiencing problems or difficulties				
Supports candidates who are unable to complete their SVQ				
Supports its own assessors and verifiers				
Has procedures in place for communicating with purchaser				
Works in collaboration with the employer / purchaser to enhance candidate motivation				
Has an evaluation processes in place to assess the quality of its SVQ provision				
Can provide positive feedback and external verification reports from other customers				

Appendix I

Glossary

NOS	National Occupational Standards
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Appendix 2

Additional provision by SVQ provider

Suggested areas for the provision of information, guidance and/or workbooks by the SVQ provider:

- Introductory portfolio/handbook containing, for example, information about SVQs, assessment, an agreement between candidate and assessor, some introductory exercises and evaluation documents
- Rights, values and the law
- Health and Safety
- Communication
- Personal and professional development
- Supporting people who are at risk of harm and abuse
- Protecting children and young people
- Personal and professional development
- Theory for care/social service practice

These will vary according to the needs of the purchaser, the nature of the contract and the level of SVQ.

Appendix 3

SVQ Skills Sets

Skills Set	SVQ level
Adult Mental Health Services	3
Children and Families	3
Children with Additional Needs	3
Complex Physical Care Needs	2, and 3
Dementia	3
Drugs and alcohol	3 and 4
First line managers	4
Housing Support	2, 3, and 4
Learning Disability	3
Physical Disabilities	2 and 3
Secure Accommodation for Young People	3 and 4
Supported Employment	3
Youth Justice	3 and 4

Comments and feedback

The Workforce Unit has a process of on-going evaluation of its support to the sector. We welcome comment and feedback on the content of this document so that future editions may incorporate your views and suggestions.

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www.sqa.org.uk

City and Guilds
www.cityandguilds.com

Scottish Social Services Council
www.sssc.uk.com

